

The background of the entire page is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this background are several layers of dark teal, semi-transparent mountain ranges, creating a sense of depth and a natural, serene atmosphere. A thin white rectangular border is centered on the page, enclosing the title and subtitle.

# LIZA'S MONDAY

and Other Poems

*Bettie Sellers*

LIZA'S MONDAY  
AND  
OTHER POEMS

Community Enrichment Series

Appalachian Consortium Press  
Boone, North Carolina

LIZA'S MONDAY  
AND  
OTHER POEMS

BY  
BETTIE SELLERS



The Appalachian Consortium was a non-profit educational organization composed of institutions and agencies located in Southern Appalachia. From 1973 to 2004, its members published pioneering works in Appalachian studies documenting the history and cultural heritage of the region. The Appalachian Consortium Press was the first publisher devoted solely to the region and many of the works it published remain seminal in the field to this day.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY GRANDMOTHER,  
COSBY SEALE PURSLEY, WHO TOLD ME  
STORIES OF BRASSTOWN



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Books by Bettie Sellers

WESTWARD FROM BALD MOUNTAIN 1974

APPALACHIAN CAROLS 1975

SPRING ONIONS AND CORNBREAD 1978

MORNING OF THE RED-TAILED HAWK 1981

LIZA'S MONDAY 1986

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THE TIME: SOME PARTS OF THE 19TH CENTURY

THE PLACE: THE BRASSTOWN VALLEY WHICH  
RUNS WEST THROUGH GEORGIA AND  
NORTH CAROLINA FROM THE  
HEIGHTS OF BRASSTOWN BALD

THE CHARACTERS: SOME REAL, SOME IMAGINED  
FROM STORIES TOLD TO ME  
BY MY GRANDMOTHER AND  
OTHERS WHO HAVE LIVED IN  
THE VALLEY

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## AND ALL THE PRINCES ARE GONE

She sits beside the oak fire, Lilah, pale,  
intent on nothing here where mountains circle  
Brasstown tight as walls around a medieval  
castle formed. She holds the book, its cover  
gone, its pages tissue thin with fingering.  
She peers through smoke to where the men,  
their coats brocaded, satin tight around  
their thighs, bow to ladies in a banquet  
hall. Soft music sounds around the spitting  
of the logs that Samuel dragged from Double  
Knob behind his lumbering ox, a mild and  
placid beast who chews his hay as though  
in contemplation of the history of his kind.  
She sees the ox, a Yule log chained behind,  
crossing the drawbridge to a castle court,  
and servants hanging holly boughs to grace  
stone walls, and torches shadowing a feast.  
Her cabin is not here, nor Samuel's supper  
simmering on the hook above the fire. Dark  
comes, and Lilah watches dancing figures spin,  
a pleasant dream to warm this wilderness where  
life is hard, and all the princes are gone.



## CHARLIE WALKS THE NIGHT

Charlie stalks the night, dark as the painter  
silent on the ridge. His bare feet touched cold  
leaves with no feeling; his eyes reach only  
for the phantoms of his dream. Night after night,  
he travels paths never seen by Brasstown's sun.

When he was eight, his mama put the key down deep  
inside a pail, sure that water's touch would wake  
him gently, send him stumbling back to bed. But,  
Charlie took the bucket, poured the water out,  
and walked an extra mile. Then Mama tied a string

around his toe, the other end to hers, so she could  
wake and keep her boy inside. She felt a little  
silly when he turned sixteen, big boy like that,  
and him all tied to Mama's toe. Now, Mama's gone,

and Charlie's free to walk. He never knows just  
where he's been, up Cedar Ridge, or down by Big  
Bald Creek where pools run dark with sleeping  
trout—no sign to mark his way except the muddy  
footprints on the rough pine porch, and sometimes,  
scraps of Oak leaves stuck on quilts that Mama made.

## SARAH'S QUILTS

She stands, barefoot, in the creek, homespun dress,  
rich brown with walnut dye, tucked up almost  
to knees that feel the rush, the chilling press  
of Corn Creek's water even in the heat

of August. Now her sons are far away:  
one running over hills his footsteps beat  
on forest trails she never saw. Laurel  
thickets tear his clothes, snatch hands

that picked up stones to end the quarrel  
once too often, left his brother dead,  
buried beneath the oak that tops the rise  
just steps behind the cabin. She sees his head

rest on patchwork squares she sewed; a quilt  
she made to warm his bed serves as a shroud  
to line his grave. His brother's fear, his guilt  
have made him run without a wrap to warm

him in the cold of mountain nights, no bright-  
patched "Star of Bethlehem" to ward off harm  
lurking behind great pines. She prays for brothers  
as she picks up stones, piles them along the bank.

One stone, now clean of blood, joins others  
she will use to lay around a space,  
an outline like the rope-strung attic bed  
where he can sleep, her quilt across his face.

## HAWK AND JAYS

By Crooked Creek, Amanda watches as six jays  
engage a sparrow hawk; their wings feinting  
blue brush near his brown-barred tail  
fanned wide with rage furious as his cry.  
He perches wary on an oak limb, dares  
further move as jays debate deep in a chinquapin.  
They attack again, again in twos and threes  
until the hawk, tiring of the game,  
abandons territory he has claimed as his.

Amanda turns from oak leaves still quivering  
after war, resumes her gathering of sticks  
to feed the fire burning low on her hearth.  
Above, the hawk swoops high across the valley,  
dives, screaming toward her frightened chicks.  
Amanda drops the wood, flaps her homespun apron:  
“You wicked bird, get away from here!  
Hush, hush, my biddies. Don’t you be afraid!”

## DON'T SEND ME OFF LIKE SOME THREE-LEGGED DOG

In memory of Prof. Adams, who told me tales

John Lowe has gone to join his other leg,  
the right one Neighbor Sam cut off with knife  
and saw that February day when winds  
perverse and raw as March whipped oak limbs

sideways, off from true, crushed nerve and bone  
beyond repair. "Don't throw it out!" John groaned.  
"Don't let me go to meet my Maker  
less than whole. Don't send me off

to hop along the golded streets of Heaven  
like some three-legged dog." So Sam devised  
a coffin smaller than a child's; of oak  
he sawed it, sealed it tight. And, while his stump

was healing, John whittled angels, tall and fair,  
with flowing robes, since who knows anyhow  
if angels have legs under all that heavenly garb.  
The decorated coffin graced the corner

of his room for forty years while John  
made do with wooden legs, another carved  
when one grew splintery with plowing  
rocky mountain cornfields, tending pigs.

And when the neighbors called, or strangers rode  
through Brasstown, John would show his coffin,  
tell about the fateful day he lost his leg.  
He'd tap the lid, smooth angel's hair,

and muse how Peter's holy touch would put  
his parts together once he got there,  
send him off down shining streets to meet  
God man-to-man, as any should. This day,

as it was told, they buried all of John,  
coffin within coffin, laid him down to rest  
among the oaks that shade the rising slopes  
of Double Knob. The preacher, come on horseback

over Unicoi, prayed long and loud  
so all could hear, and Peter surely know  
what he must do when John and all his legs  
comes knocking, knocking at the golden door.

## PINK

Her mama called her “Pink” when she was born,  
to match a tiny flower pressed in Exodus—  
from Charlestown gardens, its like not found  
among the blossoms wild in Brasstown soil.

She called the two boys “Flotsam” and “Jetsam,”  
having heard such words ring somewhere  
with all the strength of heroes: Samson, Saul—  
though never could she find them in The Book

no matter if she searched to Revelation’s end.  
The last child Mama named “Rebecca to be sure,  
make up for giving wrong names to the boys—  
and those now stuck too tight to budge.

Then Mama died, not knowing just how right  
she’d called her boys, hell-bent to leave the plow  
and hoe for parts out West where gold grew common  
as the stones they cursed in winding valley rows.

In time, their faces faded as Pink brushed  
Rebecca’s long red hair, the color of her own.  
She washed and cooked, up on a wooden stool  
that Papa made so she could reach the tubs and stove.

She stitched the gown for Rebecca’s wedding day,  
embroidered it with pinks and ragged robins  
around the neck and sleeves. In other springs,  
she knitted caps for babies never hers.

She did for Papa till his days were through  
and kept the cabin neat as Mama ever could.  
Alone, she withered slowly, frail and dry  
as petals caught and pressed by Exodus.

## AMANDA CLIMBS CEDAR RIDGE

The deepest snow in memory  
clutches at my boots.  
I have trudged down to the barn.  
Sally lows to be milked  
and the old hens cluck "cracked corn"  
no matter what the day brings.

With each step, I sink, pull up,  
spend my little strength.  
My breath comes harder  
the closer to my house I come.

Ahead of me, the snow is smooth  
with no tracks but mine  
splayed out like bears had walked  
behind me down my daily path.

At the edge of the orchard,  
a hound has padded his circle around  
my tree, a juniper planted  
after one Christmas. A forgotten  
strand of tinsel catches sun,  
reminds me of days when snow fell

only to be tossed in balls,  
and stirred in pans of sweetened cream.

## LEAH'S APRON

Her eastern window fogs with April frost,  
obscures the cabin high across the valley  
where Nathan lives alone, no smoke rising  
yet, no tall man in the barnlot tending pigs.

Leah rubs the pane with her apron's calico,  
blinks back as the sun rises over Kirby Cove  
lighting his roof and yard, remembers springs  
when Nathan came to call, a bunch of early

violets in his clumsy hand, a ring  
he fashioned out of horseshoe nails, amber  
honey from his hillside hives—small gifts  
made large with halting words, a sober

hand raised just as he turned to leave.  
But never could he say the right words  
though she waited, patient, while five springs  
of violets faded. She turns to face the room,

folding her apron thick to lift brown hoecake  
from the fire's edge. Leah smooths her apron  
with long strokes, breaks bread, and sits  
down by the window to begin another day.



## LOVE SONG FOR REBECCA

### I. REBECCA'S PAPA

"Rebecca, bring The Book and read to me a while.  
Your mama always did till you were born,  
and she was gone." The tall man, petulant  
beside the fire, looks back to watch her step down  
from the box he built to raise a child  
so she could reach the supper dishes in the pan.  
She dries small hands on a bleached sack,  
and, carrying the leather-covered book, comes close  
to sit just by his knee. "Read Abraham again,  
read how his seed will fill the land."  
She follows words across thin pages with one finger  
as he strokes her hair, dark like his own.  
Night closes in the cabin, builds a quiet wall  
around the two beside the dying fire.  
"Rebecca, take my shoes off, your mama always did."  
She kneels, obedient to his voice, unlaces heavy thongs  
and warms his feet between her hands. "I love you,  
Papa, don't be sad." He takes her in his lap.  
Unbuttoning the calico around her throat, he strokes  
soft flesh, rocking as the fire flickers out.

## II. THE PREACHER MAN

When Papa died one spring, still calling Mama's name,  
Rebecca put The Book up on the highest shelf.  
No one to read to now, she thought, no one to rock me  
by the fire at night. Her thirtieth year it was,  
and she had never been outside the valley's walls,  
had never been toward Unicoi, or west to cross through  
Brasstown Gap. Her papa died still sad because his name  
would have no son to carry it. She buried him  
by Gumlog Creek, as near to Mama as she dared,  
and drew his chair close by the fire to rock away  
the chilly nights just faintly tinged by now with violets  
opening by the creek. She rocked through days when sourwood  
enticed the bees, and till the fingered leaves of sassafras  
turned scarlet in the fall. Then through the yellow poplar  
woods, a preacher man from Carolina way came riding  
in his buggy, bringing sermons forged on rocky trails  
in mountain nights when painters cried like women in travail,  
and men could know that mortal sins were real as rocks and sky  
"Rebecca, bring The Book and read to me a while," he said.  
He echoed Papa's face and form, his dark beard flecked  
with snow like that which fell outside the cabin walls.  
He used her body sparingly, replenishing the earth as God  
has said, and never knew how much she missed her Papa rocking  
by the fire, unbuttoning the calico that warmed her waiting throat.

### III. REBECCA'S SON

She births her son toward morning, lies there  
limp, hears their whispered voices, wonders  
why they do not bring him closer, let her  
see. "Now, you just rest, Rebecca, sleep  
a while and get your strength back, sleep."  
She closes heavy eyes, still almost hearing  
voices...we daren't let her know just yet...  
break her heart...wonder what she done to get  
so marked a boy. She sleeps, and wakening  
hears morning sound, the clatter of the skillet,  
the murmuring of coffee boiling in the pot.  
The midwife Mary Nash, from up in Kirby Cove,  
sits rocking by the fire, a swaddled  
bundle quiet in her arms. Rebecca raises up:  
"Mary, bring my child, and let me see his face."  
Reluctant, Mary walks across the room  
and lays him in the crook Rebecca makes.  
Morning sun breaking through the window  
touches the birthmark shiny and red. "Jehovah God,  
what have I done that you should punish me?  
The sins are visited upon the young, The Book  
says." She lies back, bares her breast,  
guides it toward the purple mouth, and with  
one finger traces sin made visible,  
on Enoch's cheek for him to wear for life.

#### IV. ENOCH PREACHES AT GUMLOG

“Jehovah God, convict these miserable sinners, bring them to their knees.” Mid-morning sun strikes new fire from his birthmark swollen as blue veins that pulse distended, fierce around his eyes. “Conceived in mortal sin, we all are filled with wickedness, dependent on Your Mercy, damned without Your Grace. Fall down, you sinners, put your faces on the ground.” He raises clinched fists, brings them down to pound upon the rough-hewn pulpit he has carved to finish off the log church crouching in the laurel thicket close by Gumlog Creek. “Jehovah God, forgive this miserable man who bears upon his face the mark of Cain, the sin of Abram’s seed.” He falls upon his knees, sinks clutching fingers deep within the earthen floor, and weeps. Around him, empty benches line up square in quiet wooded rows.

## REQUIEM FOR A MATRIARCH

When Laura  
Lenora  
Queen Victoria  
Stanfield  
Brown  
had fried  
the last pone  
of cornbread  
on the black  
woodstove,  
her husband  
and twelve children  
buried her  
among the laurels  
head-high  
by Gumlog Creek,  
put no  
REQUIESCAT IN PACE  
on her stone.  
Old Lunsford,  
tired of carving,  
put down his chisel  
and declared:  
"I do reckon  
that name's enough.  
Ever soul  
in the county know'd  
she were a good woman  
and sore in need  
of the rest."

## EUNICE CLAIMS THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

"It's mine! How dared you give our mother's finest quilt to Cousin Ruth?" She fumes around the room, her fingers touching, clutching at the piles of many-colored quilts, the crocheted pieces Mama made those years when age had slowed her feet, and sat 'most too quiet by the fire. "The Star of Bethlehem was mine. She told me so right in this very room." Her sister, quieter still than Mama ever was, goes on about her business, clearing cupboard shelves, folding Mama's dresses in a pile. "Now, don't you dare to give away another thing! Just think how Mama'd feel, your tossing out her very life like it was trash to burn, and her not cold yet in her grave. Not one scrap, mind you. Do you her me, Sister? Not one scrap!" She lifts each folded quilt and calls its name: Step-Around-The-Mountain, Double Wedding Ring, Flower Garden, Sailor's Bow-Tie. "See these, I mind the very day she finished every one and laid it on the bed to show. And all that time, that sneaky Ruth was casting eyes, just coveting the last stitch Mama did. I knew it, and to think just when my back was turned, you'd go and give away my quilt. Well, you just leave this room, and don't come back again! I'll move my things in here, and see you don't throw out our Mother's life. You can sleep alone, you hear, and don't ever speak to me again!"

## MORNINGS, SHEBA COMBS HER HAIR

She watches from the open door, the man  
long-legged, tall and straight, his hair aflame  
like foxes make as they run through the broom  
sedge patch behind her house. This neighbor  
passes by each day to climb the slope  
of Cedar Ridge, cut logs to build a barn  
near where the trail that crosses Unicoi  
turns west through Brasstown Gap.  
She watches, thinking how her own man,  
gone these three years, never had  
that loose-limbed stride, that fire atop  
his head. Older than she, he never made  
her heart run wild and fly across the valley  
free as red-tailed hawks rise high  
on currents of cold morning air. She watches,  
planning how one day she'll walk out, ask him  
how his wife does, how his son. She'll wait  
beside the big oak, ask him in to warm his hands  
before her hearth, to notice how her dark hair falls  
as smooth as water in Corn Creek caresses stones.  
How she will warm cold fingers in his hair,  
and face eternal burning if she must.

## ENOCH'S SERMONS

### I. A DAY OF CLOUDS AND THICK DARKNESS

Enoch rises, opens up The Book. Aaron drops his eyes, turns them on his boots, not seeing worn leather toes but Sheba's face, her dark head bent. She sits across the church where he can see the curve of cheek he's cupped with tender hands, the shoulders soft and warm, now masked in Sunday calico. Beside him, Joel stirs and yawns, his bright head drooping now against his father's side. Enoch reads, his voice a burning pain in Aaron's mind: abomination...thy neighbor's wife...defile...shalt not... The words, the words...abomination...neighbor's wife. He'd never meant to go inside, but coming down each night from Cedar Ridge, he'd seen her standing in the open door, smelled fragrant hickory burning on her hearth. That day, November chilled the bright still air in Brasstown. And he was cold. Aaron glances toward his wife, her lips set Sunday-tight, her eyes on Enoch's purple mouth. What if her sharp eyes looked through Sheba's calico, her flesh? They'd see his seed, insidious, growing wild as pigweed taints the dark soil of his garden rows. They'd all see soon, these neighbors, friends. Aaron feels the boy, breathing softly now in sleep. He sees his wife's skirt move to touch his leather toes. Jehovah God, he thinks, what will I do? But God, Oh God! I was so cold!



## II. O ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON

What did that David know? Did he once carry Absalom inside his belly, feel his warm mouth urging milk from full breasts swollen in hard ropes of sustenance and pain? Watch him live a week, a month, then cease to breathe no matter what he did? Amanda draws her grey shawl tight across dry breasts, flabby these many childless years. Her twisting fingers count a row of tiny graves grown over with laurel now by Gumlog Creek. What does that Enoch know? Him like a eunuch with his purple face no woman would dare touch for fear of bearing sons marked like him. "But the king covered his face and the king cried out with a loud voice..." Enoch reads The Book again, tells of Joab chiding David for his grief. Amanda stirs, glances sideways at the man whose seed was weak, that seed so ripe and quickening until exposed to light. What does that man know, him with his "Never you mind, Amanda. God just didn't mean our sons to live and have to face this wicked world." She feels her dry breasts fill again, watches as milk trickles down her wrinkled flesh like tears.

### III. THE FOUNTAIN IN THE WAY TO SHUR

Abigail sees through log walls, across  
the barrier tall mountains make, to where  
the sea laps on earth so warm she feels it  
in her fingertips pressed against her thighs.  
Fearful in this alien land of deep thickets,  
painters prowling, snow, she is as Hagar  
thrust into a trackless wilderness. But here,  
by Gumlog Creek, no angel of the Lord has  
found her, ministered to her need. How many  
times has she heard Enoch promise help from  
this Jehovah: a cloud by day, a pillar of fire  
in deep darkness, an angel hand. And nothing  
came to Abigail. If this Jehovah is so great,  
how has He not seen Enoch's face, laid on  
His hands to heal that purple lying mouth,  
no more effective than the lying prayers  
she nightly prays to One who never hears.

#### IV. NO BALM IN GILEAD

The church walls darken; Enoch's face fades  
as though April sun had gone behind a cloud  
or dropped between the peaks of Raven Cliffs.  
Anna blinks her eyes, sees only mist as pain,  
insistent in her side, drowns out Enoch's voice:  
"Why then is not the health of the daughter  
of my people recovered?" Elizabeth stirs,  
touches her mother's hand: "You alright, Mama?"  
Anna nods, afraid to trust speech, reveal her fear  
now deeper than death: how to plant corn and peas  
to feed herself, Elizabeth, when weakness comes  
in waves, waves hard and round in her side  
as oak roots washed to view by spring rain's fall.  
How to leave Elizabeth alone, this child who cannot  
learn beyond the simplest thing. The sound of Enoch's  
voice returns: "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there  
no physician here?" Anna closes her eyes, bows  
in prayer. Elizabeth pats her mother's hand:  
"Open your eyes, Mama. Mama, I can't see your eyes!"

## V. NOW THE LORD HAD PREPARED A GREAT FISH

And Enoch reads of Jonah, disobedient to the Lord, swallowed by the great fish. He tells of Nineveh, and forty days to punishment. "Repent, repent of sin!" His voice is high and thin. "Let every man be covered with sackcloth." The congregation stirs, uneasy, feels the weight of wrongs brought here to holy ground disguised in piety and Sunday garb. "Come to the Lord, repent your wickedness!" One, two, they come, then more. They cling around the mourner's bench, curve against the oaken rail as scales overlap on trout swimming deep pools in Gumlog Creek. They cling, they sway in ecstasy of guilt. A rumble groans beneath the logs, a grinding of stones stacked three deep beneath a corner. Slowly, the church leans, slowly west it slides. "A sign, a sign! Oh God, convict us of our sins! Old Jonah knew, he knew! Jehovah spit us from the belly of the fish that we may save our souls, go preach the word in Nineveh! Repent!" The congregation lies in heaps against the western wall, afraid to move lest He should bring the mountain down as well. "Crawl, my brethren, crawl to God!" Enoch leads the way across the tilting floor until the church rocks back. "A miracle, my brethren, let us sing a verse "Just As I Am," and pray for fish to swallow us whene're we stray again!"

## VI. ISAIAH TREED

“...and all liars, shall have their part  
in the lake that burneth with fire  
and brimstone.” Enoch pounds his text  
into the far corners of the church—  
the back corner where Ike tugs the collar  
of his shirt, feels the lie around his neck  
like a burning rope soaked in coal oil.  
The stink of brimstone fills his throat;  
his cheeks know Enoch’s eyes, cold fire  
accusing, commanding that he rise, come  
forward, and repent. The mourner’s bench  
looms large, fills the church from front  
to back, pushes Ike through the door and,  
running, down the path to Gumlog Creek.  
There the big oak, full with July, beckons—  
and he climbs, up, up until the limbs grow  
small, and he can wrap his arms around  
the trunk, press his burning face against  
the scratchy bark. He hears a rustling  
from the creek below, a low chant moaning,  
rising, ever rising: “Come, Isaiah, come  
to God. Repent your sins. Repent!”  
The rough bark moves beneath his skin;  
leaves flicker toward his head like flames.

## MIRACLE AT RAVEN GAP

“If I could have a mess of greens  
just once before I die.”  
Old Mary Dean lies pale and thin,  
her kinfolk standing by.

“I’ve got a patch of turnips, Min,  
don’t guess they’ll hurt her none.  
I’ll fry a pone of cornbread too,  
be back here when the sun

sets down in Raven Gap.” So Nell  
went home and fixed a plate  
for Mary Dean’s last dying wish—  
and with a will she ate.

Next morning, Nell thought ghosts could walk.  
She started, gave her head a scratch  
when out her window saw at dawn  
Old Mary digging in her turnip patch.

## THE MIDWIFE

No question who had fathered this one.  
Mary Nash rocks back on aching knees,  
continues tidying up the job she's done  
of catching Lena Mathis' son. A long night  
this, and more than ample time to hear  
the name thrust out between clenched teeth,  
a name that Mary knows too well from twenty  
years of sleeping in his bed. My Cal, she  
thinks, and I have given him no son but this  
I claim with no part but my hands, my skill  
in birthing other women's sons. She ties  
the dark cord, cuts it neat, and binds  
the little belly tight. Poor mite, he'll have  
no name but Lena Mathis' son, the one who looks  
so much like Calvin Nash, they'll say. She lays  
him, swaddled now, beside his mother's arm,  
and, turning, reaches shaking hands for coffee  
simmering in the black pot on the hearth.

## NOVEMBER WIND

An early winter cold  
hums around Granny Knob,  
sets the Cabin hissing  
like a woman  
barely holding her peace.  
Her tongue flicks edges  
of a mouth dry, set white  
above the lip.  
Molly turns her back,  
drags the dishrag  
hard across a table  
clean already.  
Water roils in the pan,  
splashes beside tears  
on the scrubbed-pine floor.  
She will not speak;  
it is not permitted,  
but when she takes her bed,  
her back will offer him  
silence  
echoing the clatter  
of polished pans  
in a too-clean room.



## FOOL'S GOLD

Salathiel John never looks on a stranger  
but he tilts his black hat,  
potential danger to that man's gold  
if he cuts the cards from Salathiel's hand,  
engages him in stud or draw.

Salathiel John never left Brasstown Valley  
but once, for nearby Auraria—  
where wealth, so they said,  
was there for the digging up any draw.  
He found fool's gold and a deck of cards,  
grew a fulsome beard, bought a soft black hat,  
learned that cutting the cards was an easier row  
than digging for gold, or in Brasstown for corn.

Now he sits by the oak where the trail  
from Auraria turns west toward the mountain,  
sits fanning his cards in a nonchalant way.  
He tips his black hat, speaks to any man passing  
in the softest of tones. He keeps his gold  
in a brown leather pouch he made from the hide  
of a buck he found up a draw in Auraria,  
up the draw in Auraria where he learned to play stud.

## JACOB'S CAUSE

War done, feet horned from trails long winding down  
through Nantahala's Gorge to Double Knob and home,  
Jacob rocks as he will rock for thirty years and more.  
No plowing now, he's done his share in battles  
fought from First Bull Run to White Oak Swamp  
with Stonewall Jackson and his mighty troop.  
When neighbors pass along the path that winds  
below the Knob and down along Corn Creek, he hails:  
"Neighbor, come and set a spell. Have I told you  
how we whupped them damned blue-bellies good  
and captured what we didn't downright kill?  
Old Stonewall said we wuz the best he ever saw,  
us boys from out these hills with eyes so sharp  
as ever dropped a squirrel from pine or oak  
or stopped a horse thief in his tracks." Antietam,  
Jacob's red-bone hound lies, yawning, by his side.  
His paws run rabbits in his sleep while Jacob rocks,  
slow, then faster, faster as the battle rages on.  
Old Stonewall take Manassas Junction once again.

## WARTS FOR PARALEE

"Paralee's a witch, Mae. She'll conjure off  
your warts. We'll hide beside the lower road."  
Two little girls peer down the rutted track  
where mountains turn to valley fields, look west

to see the woman, old and humped, leaning on her cane.  
Her eyes are light, strange light that burns Mae's  
hands, trembling now but willing to be warmed  
by any touch that might take horny lumps away. Eyes

burn through laurel clumps where two girls hide; eyes  
swing away. She limps on down the track toward Lee's  
where she will knock three times, and ask a bed tonight.

## ELLIE'S NEIGHBORS

### I. MARY'S APPLES

That rag-tag and bob-tail over at the other side  
of the valley can't keep outta grief. That Mary's  
done it this time, gone and broke her leg chasing  
after one of Sudie's younguns. Serves her right,  
old witch, always yelling when they come by  
her house. Like she was God of Brasstown.  
Don't want nothin' or nobody touching what's hers.  
She acts like every stick she owns is the Ark  
of the Covenant—and she'll be struck dead one day  
for blasphemy, she will. Her apples, indeed! Like  
God made Eden just for her, and Sudie's pore younguns  
weren't to come near it. Just because she come here  
first, she thinks that every spoonful of earth from  
Double Knob to Raven Cliffs was made for her benefit!  
You'd think that line from the thunderstruck oak  
to Corn Creek was drawn by Moses with a golden stick  
to keep the rest of us from crossing to the upper gap.  
Why, just the other day, I seen her beating Lymon Shockley's  
pig because he sniffed her steps and nosed around her tree.  
And then chewed Lymon out—for owning a pig! I swear,  
I just can't get nothin' done for watching what she does!

## II. NAOMI'S NERVE

Naomi Davis died this morning, did ya hear?  
Now, there was a woman with nerve! Some past  
ninety she was, and it forty year since she fought  
the wolves all night. I remember hearing how she  
threwed rocks to keep 'em off her calves over  
by Lick Log Creek. Ain't been no wolves around  
here in many a year, but I heard tell of times  
when they run in packs all through these hills—  
stole stock and younguns too, if'n they was left  
alone too long. Usta be powerful bad over to  
Lick Log, drawed by all that Davis stock, I  
rightly suspicion. And no man on the place the night  
Naomi fought! Them Davis men was bad to wander—  
allus flitting off over the Gap for some cause  
or nother, they was. Naomi never said a word,  
though; all them Davises has some pride to burn,  
would of let them wolves tear their throat afore  
they'd speak any word to let the family down.  
I don't doubt none they'll bury Naomi proud.

### III. AN AWFUL SORRY MAN

That Homer's mean, Amanda, mean as sin!  
Allus tell, anybody with squinchey little eyes  
can't be nothing else. Come into the store  
t'other day, seen Lem Sykes buying some sugar,  
knocked the poke out'n his hand and taken his  
place at the counter. Just as ornery  
as an upland rattler in a dry spell, I swear!  
His pore mama died when he was no more'n three,  
left them four boys to raise theyselves. Run  
wild, that passel of younguns did, run wild!  
Growed up big and mean—half the folks round  
Wolf Pen Gap can testify to that. And that  
pore wife of his'n, don't know why she up  
and wedded such a sorry man. Many's the day  
I seen her with both eyes blackened and she ain't  
hardly got no teeth left. Looks like she would  
of taken a stick of stovewood and frailed  
the daylights outta him! He ain't worth the powder  
and shot to kill him, may I drop dead if'n I lie!

#### IV. CHARLIE LEECH'S WIVES

Sudie, look at that string of younguns coming into preaching, tripping behind that Charlie like a covey of quail skittering across the pasture. I swear, that man's got a finger in more than one pie! Niece, indeed! She don't look like no Leech I ever saw, nor none of his mother's kin neither. When she come here to help out Lena, and her down with low blood, I had my suspicions then. Now, for sure, there's three more younguns since she came, and Lena allus ailing. I ain't seen her up and about these four years past, but that Serena's been to preaching twicet and more with a new brood—just like her, squinchey eyes and scrawny hair. I heard too that Charlie killed some sixteen hogs this winter past, and don't you tell me Lena's young needs any ways that kinda meat! I wandered over towards Turkey Buzzard Gap just t'other day, seen Serena pranching around in the back lot like she owned the place. Counted six yard younguns too. I swear, Sudie, that's too many for one woman, and her been down this long with that low blood!

## V. THE BRAGGART

Look at that Abe Carpenter go swaggering by,  
I swear, that's the braggingest man I've seed!  
Luke heard him running off last week as to how  
he'd killed over a hundred bucks in his life,  
and none of them with less'n seven points, too.  
I bet if 'n he was Samson, he'd of slew twicet  
as many of them Philistines as that Samson  
done, or more'n twicet, to hear him telling it!  
Ain't nobody in this valley gonna believe him  
and his tale about how he fought The War. Why,  
he couldn't even of been borned when them old  
English come and tried to make us some of  
their'n. Must of been some yarn his grandaddy  
told—though, if 'n that old man fought anything  
fiercer'n a rocking chair, I'd eat my bonnet!  
All "say-so" and no "do-so" them Carpenters, each  
and ever one of them. And Abe the worst, for sure!  
Hear him tell it, he's been clean to that Pacific  
Ocean and back, killing Indians all the way, scalp'n  
them too, though if 'n them ain't coon pelts he's  
got  
hanging on his wall, I'll salt and pepper my best  
Sunday apron, and eat it ever living scrap!



## VI. A THREAT OF BLACK EYES

I seen him, Sudie, seen that pore Lee boy  
over to Aunt Liddie's! Went and hanged  
hissself, he did, on one of them big oaks  
out behind her barn. They say he was desperate  
over that snippy Jenkins gal over by Lick Log,  
been casting sheep's eyes at him these two  
years past, she has. I seen her at preaching—  
taking in ever thing in pants, them as are free  
and them tied as well. Ain't no better'n she  
should of been, that gal! Can't be no more'n  
sixteen neither, flirting round ever since  
she was less'n ten. Them black eyes sneaking  
out'n the ruffles on her bonnet like a pair  
of chickadees a-courtin' in a budding sycamore.  
I swear, ain't no woman's man safe when such  
as that is free to run loose in this valley!

## LIZA'S MONDAY

She has left her tubs and boiling sheets, fled  
north across the woodlot, heard no grumble  
from the pigs as she passed, the chicken shed  
where eggs wait to be gathered, felt

no pain as December's harsh wind dried  
lye soap on her arms, reddened hands held  
stiff by her sides, palms forward as to catch  
the gusts that sweep the slopes of Double Knob.

Inside the cabin: Ethan's shirt to patch,  
the fire to mend, small Issac sleeping  
in his crib, soon to wake for nursing.  
These and other chores are in her keeping,

but she hurries up the mountainside  
as on an April day to search for mint  
and cress, to find first violets that hide  
in white and purple patches by Corn Creek.

The ridge is steep and rocky, sharp with briars.  
Raked inside by gales howling bleak  
as northern winds around the cabin whine,  
she does not feel the laurel tug her dress,

the briars pricking dark red beads that shine  
on bare arms. All winter afternoon she climbs  
until she gains the highest rocks, the knobs  
where one can look out, trace the spines

of distant mountains, scan the valley floor—  
black dots for shed and cabin, smoke only wisps  
blown by the wind. Lisa sees no more:  
not broken stones underfoot, not heavy sky

holding snow. She sits on Double Knob, back  
against the ledge, and watches night come by  
to close the valley, wipe her clearing out  
as though it has never been. Snow clouds

roil around Liza's head, wrap cold arms about  
bent shoulders, fill her aproned lap, open hands,  
Below, the wash-fire has burned down to embers;  
Ethan long begun the search across his lands.

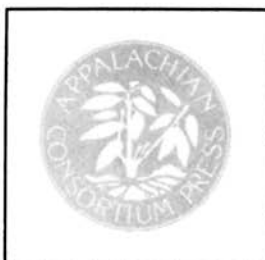
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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bettie Sellers earned a B.A. from LaGrange College and an M.A. from the University of Georgia, both in English. She accepted a position at Young Harris College in 1966 where she remained until she retired in 1997. Sellers published several works of poetry including *Wild Ginger*. She was named author of the year by the Dixie Council of Authors and Journalists in 1979. Sellers died on May 17, 2013, at the age of 87 in Hayesville, NC.

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